

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 29, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
300 7th Street, SW Washington, D.C. 20024

The Honorable Mark A. Morgan
Acting Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Washington, D.C. 20229

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf and Acting Commissioner Morgan,

We write to express our support for U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) July 2, 2020 announcement to designate the Autonomous Surveillance Towers (AST) system as a Program of Record for the U.S. Border Patrol (USBP), and to request a briefing on CBP's plans to deploy this technology along the southwest, northern, and maritime borders. As strong supporters of innovative technology to secure our borders, we believe AST is the type of modern technology that fits into a fair and efficient border security strategy based on a mile-by-mile needs analysis of our borders.

As you know, AST systems enhance border security in an efficient and cost-effective manner. By using radar scanning technology, AST detects and tracks movement along the border, distinguishes items of interest between animals, vehicles, drones, and people, and immediately alerts USBP agents of such movement. AST is fully autonomous and does not require additional manpower to operate. These systems are also environmentally friendly – they are fully solar powered, require no additional infrastructure, and do not impact the land where they are located. At a cost of about \$100,000 per mile, this technology is fiscally responsible, offering significant cost advantages compared to the alternatives.

It is our understanding that by increasing situational awareness along the southwest border, during its pilot phase, AST systems allowed USBP agents to substantially reduce drug trafficking in the San Diego, Laredo, and Rio Grande sectors. While we applaud CBP for this accomplishment and for quickly transitioning AST from a pilot to a Program of Record, we want to ensure this technology is deployed in all southwest USBP sectors, including in New Mexico and Arizona, to prevent Transnational Criminal Organizations from exploiting potential security gaps between the sectors in which AST systems are currently deployed. Indeed, the landscape in New Mexico and Arizona is ideal for AST, since this technology is especially useful in

mountainous areas where wall construction can be impractical or unfeasible, and in remote and rural areas, which according to USBP are “perfectly suited” for AST.¹

We are also pleased CBP recognizes the benefits of AST systems for securing the northern and maritime borders. We understand CBP is currently completing an AST pilot project along the northern border where we lack situational awareness, as well as starting to deploy a maritime variant of AST to help secure our coastlines and waterways, which are major channels for drug trafficking.

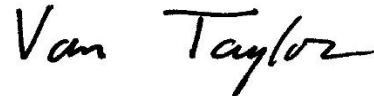
We commend CBP for these efforts and look forward to learning more about the agency’s plans to continue using innovative and cost-effective technology to secure our borders. Therefore, we request a briefing on CBP’s rollout strategy of the AST program, including when CBP will deploy AST to the New Mexico and Arizona international border with Mexico, as well as the northern and maritime borders.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and prompt response.

Sincerely,



Xochitl Torres Small
Member of Congress



Van Taylor
Member of Congress



Elissa Slotkin
Member of Congress



Elise M. Stefanik
Member of Congress

¹ U.S. Customs and Border Protection, “CBP’s Autonomous Surveillance Towers Declared a Program of Record along the Southwest Border.” <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/cbp-s-autonomous-surveillance-towers-declared-program-record-along>